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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [VM](#)  
SUBJECT: EDITOR SACKED FOR PUBLICLY CRITICIZING ARRESTS OF  
ANTI-CORRUPTION REPORTERS

REF: A) HANOI 563 B) HANOI 865 C) 07 HCMC 1136

(SBU) Summary: On July 30, a senior editor from Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper was sacked and banned from working in the media in retaliation for his editorial in support of the journalists arrested in connection with their reporting on the so-called "PMU-18 scandal." This reprisal comes as the latest development in the Government of Vietnam's crackdown on journalists for reporting this important corruption case. End Summary.

12. (SBU) On July 30, the HCMC Communist Youth Union leadership board (which administers the Tuoi Tre newspaper) authorized disciplinary action against Bui Thanh, senior editor of Tuoi Tre (Youth) newspaper. Thanh said that he was informed that he would be removed from his position, banned from ever working in the media, and his press card would be revoked.

JUSTICE AND JOURNALISTS BOTH AFFRONTED  
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13. (SBU) Thanh said the official reason for his dismissal was the "serious consequences" to public opinion that his May 13 editorial caused. The editorial, published in Tuoi Tre the day after two reporters were arrested in connection with their stories on a massive corruption scandal within the Ministry of Transportation's Project Management Unit Number 18 (PMU-18), stated that the arrested reporters had been "protect[ing] this beautiful life from the rotting worms," and that their arrests had "enraged" the media. The editorial disparaged the GVN's handling of the PMU-18 case as an "insult to justice" in which newspapers were the "victims."

14. (SBU) Media contacts noted that Thanh, together with Huynh Son Phuoc -- the paper's former deputy chief editor who was sacked two weeks ago (ref B) -- had formed a reformist core at Tuoi Tre, the newspaper that has been at the forefront of pushing the envelope on censorship in Vietnam (ref C). The editors' removals have come as serious blows to media morale, with journalists at Tuoi Tre privately expressing their anger and frustration over the arrests to us and intimating that the crackdown is leading some to consider changing careers. One reporter intoned, "the history of Tuoi Tre ends here."

PMU 18 FALL-OUT NOT OVER  
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15. (SBU) Media sources have suggested that the investigation is ongoing. According to a senior journalist from Tuoi Tre, police will continue to hold "working sessions" with the editorial board for the next week. During the past week, well-connected contacts inside the National Assembly and the Ministry of Public Security either reverted to the Party line -- which blames the journalists for abusing media power -- or chose to ignore our inquiries when asked to discuss the reporters' arrests.

COMMENT: A DEMORALIZED PRESS

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16. (SBU) Coming in the wake of the sacking of two editors last fall (ref C) and the firing of another last week (ref B), this reprisal against Mr. Thanh represents yet another blow against the pioneering Tuoi Tre newspaper. The particularly harsh retributions meted out against Thanh may well be intended to break the spirit at the publication that has continued to push the envelope on what can be published in Vietnam despite being sanctioned numerous times previously (reftels). The severity of the punishment has demoralized the entire HCMC journalist community, and even open-minded political insiders have begun to refuse to discuss the arrests with us. It is too soon to say if this latest reprisal represents a fundamental reversal of the welcome shift in the gradual movement toward a more open press environment described in ref C or if the sackings of Thanh and his colleagues at Tuoi Tre are intended to demonstrate that news outlets cannot move beyond the strict limits on reporting described in ref C: no reporting on corruption among top party leadership (or their relatives and core supporters) and no criticism of GVN/CPV political policies or actions (such as Thanh's gutsy editorial criticizing the arrest of the PMU-18 reporters). End comment.

17. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy-Hanoi.

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